URBAN FORESTRY OR FOREST URBANISM?

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Since the urban planning law of 1962 Belgian spatial development is regulated by systematic and strict (and rather detailed) land use plans. These organize the horizontal juxtaposition of functions. Forest is one of these 'land uses'. As a consequence, the forests are being pushed inside its land-use boundary. Each tree within a forest zone is carefully considered, planned and managed and seems increasingly less compatible with urbanization that paradoxically sprouts organically on almost any given location, even outside their land-use destination.

It is generally accepted by now that this zoning is outdated and that planning should rather facilitate vertical superposition. In the compact city this is referred to as 'mixity' and it increasingly requires interdisciplinarity inputs that are not bounded to a sole area of expertise. This presentation, by urban designers, aims to contribute to bridging the disciplines of urbanism and forestry.

It is evident that the monofunctional specialization of space in the end leads to a loss of ecological systems and biodiversity. It will be argued in the presentation that it also leads to a loss of quality in a lot of dwelling environments and other urbanized areas. In this presentation we especially want to highlight the quality of dwelling environments that are embedded in a forest or vice versa that constitute with their large gardens with full-grown trees a zero degree of forest. Coexistence of urbanization and forestry indeed generates interesting 'intermediate' territorial forms and figures. Through a case study in the transition between three different Belgian landscapes - Dijleland, Hageland and Zuiderkempen meeting in the municipality of Rotselaar - it becomes clear how forest overlaps with dispersed urbanization.

Over the years Rotselaar has known a great shift in its forest stock. The location and quality of the forest is highly dependent on the topography and soil conditions: loamy soils are mainly used for agricultural purposes, while the lower clay and higher sandy soils were gradually forested with deciduous - read Populus - and coniferous species - mainly the normal pine. At the same time these landscape conditions also lead to different urbanization forms, indirectly creating a link between forest and urban, but not evident and far from optimized.

By acknowledging the necessity for a stronger relation, it leads to new urban design tools and intermediate structure; where the tree and the house have equal volume; where both ecological system and urban structure seem lost; and finally where forestry and urbanism as disciplines merge into forest urbanism, or was this urban forestry?